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ABSTRACT

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ED 367 135

Social status and the sequencing rules of other-introductions

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The study examines the speech act sequence of introductions among native speakers of American English from a wide variety of occupations, educational backgrounds, and role relationships. Specifically, the focus of the study is on the sequencing of other-introductions; namely, in an introduction that involves at least three participants, who gets introduced to whom? Three kinds of patterns are discussed based on collected data. First, four basic rules are formulated, each according to one distinct conditioning factor such as social status (when it is unequal), social distance, situational context, and the introducer's intent (when social status is equal). Next, four combined patterns with congruent factors are discussed. Finally, four overriding patterns that include two conflicting factors are suggested; however, only the pattern regarding social status and situational context is confirmed due to the limited data set.

Introduction

Recent research in the fields of sociolinguistics and TESOL has highlighted the need for ESL textbook writers and language teachers to incorporate sociolinguistic and situational factors into their language planning and teaching. It has been pointed out that effective communication in a speech community encompasses the processing of both social and linguistic knowledge (Hymes, 1964; Canale & Swain, 1980; Olsthtain & Cohen, 1983; Wolfson, 1989). Also, awareness of situational factors is said to be significant in reducing miscommunication or communication breakdown (Cazden, 1972; Gumperz, 1982; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990). Lacking necessary sociolinguistic knowledge and missing certain situational cues, learners of English might experience communication failure despite their level of linguistic proficiency. They need native speakers of English to inform them on how to produce and understand appropriate utterances in a given context (Billmyer, 1990). However, as Wolfson (1989) points out, native speakers of English often rely on their intuitions

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when designing ESL textbooks and/or teaching language without knowing the underlying principles for when to use what. These intuitions have been shown to be inadequate and even contradictory to actual use. For instance, Pica (1983) contrasted the rules of article use of American English given in ESL textbooks with the use by native speakers. She found that article use by native speakers often contradicted the rules given in the ESL textbooks she examined and concluded that the varied use of articles is contingent upon the setting of interaction and various other contextual features. Researchers suggest studying and teaching speech acts, which can reveal the discrepancy between native speakers' attitudes/beliefs and patterns of actual use, thus enabling learners to become aware of the sociolinguistic rules of the target language and the situational factors in which speakers interact (Wolfson, 1989; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990).

Speech act sequences such as requesting, apologizing, refusing, and complimenting have been widely described in the literature. However, the speech act sequence of introductions has yet to be studied. Information on introductions in ESL textbooks often includes only linguistic patterns; few textbooks provide sociolinguistic rules. These *rules*, based largely on textbook writer's intuitions, are sometimes in conflict with each other. Despite the lack of empirical studies on introductions, they are extremely important and useful for learners to know in order to properly interact with native speakers: daily interactions often start with introductions. Learning necessary rules for introductions can also help learners achieve certain goals, such as asking for information. On the other hand, being unaware of the rules for introductions (or failing to make an introduction when one is expected) can cause social faux pas for learners. Empirical research is needed since rules given in ESL textbooks are largely intuitively based, rather than empirically tested.

Social Status and Speech Act Sequence

Studies on speech act sequences such as requesting, apologizing, refusing, and complimenting have indicated that social status is one of the most important variables that condition certain aspects of social rules. Some of the rules concerning social status in each speech act sequence are recapitulated below.

In Ervin-Tripp's study (1976), she divides requests into six categories–ranging from most direct to most implicit. Of these, status (rank) is the most salient social factor. In other words, the higher a speaker in status, the more direct form of requests was used.

In describing the apology speech act set, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) examined interaction between apologizer and the recipient in terms of social status. They found that social status affects speaker choice of semantic formula. That is, apologizers of a lower status tended to offer an apology of higher intensity (e.g., "I'm terribly sorry") to a higher status recipient but use one of low intensity (e.g., "I am sorry") to equal- or lower- status recipients.

Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1985) found that when refusing an invitation, speakers of American English offered a shorter and unelaborated response to unequal-status addressees (both superiors and subordinates) but made much longer and more elaborated response to status-equal addressees.

Wolfson (1989), in her study of compliments, points out that there is an implicit rule against complimenting one's superiors among middle-class speakers of American English. Billmyer (1990) illustrates this point by citing the following example: A male Malaysian student complimented his female teacher, "You are wearing a lovely dress. It fits you" (from Holmes & Brown, 1987). Billmyer explains that this compliment failed on pragmatic grounds because the speaker was unaware of the restrictions given by males to females and by lower status to higher status individuals.

Other-introductions

Given the great impact that social status has on the speech act sequences discussed above, it is likely that social status will also play a significant role in the speech act sequence of introductions. Hence, the research question of this study is: How does social status affect the sequencing rules of other-introductions? That is, in an introduction that involves three participants, who gets introduced to whom?

The participants for this study were all native speakers of American English. They were males and female adults (20+) of different ages and with a wide variety of occupations and educational backgrounds. Role relationship is also given attention in this study since it is crucial in determining social status. Role relationships encompass those of professors and students, employers and employees, classmates, co-workers, friends, family members, and so forth.

Audiocassette recordings and fieldnotes were used to collect spontaneous introductions in face-to-face interactions. A total of 96 tokens were collaboratively collected by 10 researchers. The research group included one professor and nine graduate students in Educational Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania.

In this study, introductions are defined as the speech act sequence which follows the dictionary definition found in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, "To make known for the first time to each other or someone else, especially by telling 2 people each other's names" (1989:751).

Service encounters and formal introductions have been excluded. By definition, only 55 out of the total of 96 tokens collected were introductions. These were divided into *other-introductions* (at least 3 participants) and *self-introductions* (at least 2 participants). Self-introductions were further divided into *other-initiated* and *self-initiated* introductions. The distribution of introduction types is given below (Table 1)

Table 1: Introduction Types

Self-introductions			Other-introductions	Total
self-initiated	other-initiated	total		
20	5	25	30	55

Since introductions involving more than two participants are more likely to occur in spontaneous conversation, this paper will focus on other-introductions.

Discussion

Basic Rules

Based upon the 30 tokens of other-introductions, four basic rules can be found in terms of introducees. These rules are called *basic* because in each of them only one distinct factor appears to be involved in determining the sequencing rules of other-introductions. The factors that govern each rule are: social status (in status-unequal relationship), social distance, situational context, and the introducer's intent (in status-equal relationship). These four basic rules are described below.

(1) In situations of unequal status, a person of a lower status will first be introduced to a person of a higher status (and then vice versa).

(2) In situations of equal status, the person who has lower (closer) social distance to the introducer will first be introduced to the person who has greater social distance from the introducer (and then vice versa).

(3) In situations of equal status which involves a new person entering a conversation, the old participant will first be introduced to the new conversant (and then vice versa).

(4) In situations of equal status within a context where a speaker wishes to continue conversational flow without abrupt interruption, he/she introduces the silent third party beside him/her to the person who is talking or whom he/she is conversing with.

Basic Rule 1: Unequal status–low to high

Both Aaron[1] (the mayor) and Francis (the judge) were invited speakers in a seminar. A staff member, Pamela (of a lower status to both speakers) was the introducer.

Pamela: (to Aaron, with her arm pointing to Francis) Oh, this is Judge Francis. (And to Francis, with her arm pointing to Aaron) This is Major Aaron.
Aaron: Hello, how are you. Nice to meet you.
Francis: Nice to meet you. (To other students around) Hi, everybody!

In the above example, Pamela (relatively low in social status) first introduced Judge Francis (relatively high in social status) to Mayor Aaron (whose social status is highest among the three). In this case, the introducing sequence that the introducer (i.e., Pamela) used appeared to follow Basic Rule 1.

Near the front desk in the lobby of a Sheraton hotel, Ted (a security supervisor) introduced Neil (a new security guard) to Mr. Brown (the general manager).

Ted: Mr. Brown, I'd like you to meet Neil, our new security.
Mr. Brown: Hi, nice to meet you, good luck!
Neil smiles and shakes hand with Mr. Brown.

In the second example above, it is apparent that Ted was also following Basic Rule 1: the new security guard, Neil (lowest in social status) was introduced to the general manager, Mr. Brown (relatively high in social status).

Basic Rule 2: Social distance–close to distant

Sharon is a close friend of and pastor to Kim (the introducer). Kim and Tracy are neighbors in the same apartment complex. All participants interacted as equal.

Kim: Well, Hi (pleasantly surprised)
Tracy: Hi.
Kim: Tracy, this is Sharon, the associate pastor at my church.

Since participants in the above example were equal in social status, there must be another factor that conditioned Kim's introducing sequence. In this case, social

distance appeared to be the conditioning factor. Kim introduced Sharon (her close friend) to Tracy (her neighbor).

> In a room in the church 15 minutes before a wedding, Marcia, the bride introduced her good friend, Patricia, to Sharon, the associate pastor of the church.
>
> Marcia: Sharon, this is my good friend Patricia. (To Patricia) This is our other pastor.
> Patricia extends her hand; Sharon shakes it and smiles a greeting.

In the second example, Marcia obviously followed Basic Rule 2 by first introducing her good friend, Patricia (lower in social distance) to Sharon.

> Basic Rule 3: Situational context–old participant to new conversant
>
> Daphne went to visit her friend, Angela (the introducer). They walked together to Angela's office and met her co-worker and friend, Mike in the office.
>
> Angela: Mike, this is my friend, Daphne. Daphne, this is Mike.
> Daphne and Mike: Hi.

In the above example, neither social status nor social distance was the relevant factor that conditioned Angela's introducing sequence since the three participants were all equal in social status, and both Daphne and Mike are rather close to Angela. It appeared that the situational context was the conditioning factor. That is, Mike in this case was the new conversant. Hence, Daphne (the old participant) was introduced to him.

> When Dr. Karen Morse (a professor) and Michelle (a graduate student of hers) were coming out the lecture hall, Tina (another graduate student) recognized Dr. Morse and greeted her. Dr. Morse did the introduction.
>
> Dr. Morse: (Standing in the middle of the two people, with her arm pointing to Michelle and Tina almost at the same time) This is Michelle; this is Tina.
> Michelle: Hello.
> Tina: How do you do.

In this case, Dr. Morse first introduced Michelle (the old participant) to Tina (the new conversant), following Basic Rule 3.

Basic Rule 4: Introducer's intent to continue conversational flow

The data also showed that the sequence of other-introduction is possibly conditioned by the introducer's intent to continue the conversation with the same speaker without interruption.

> Ken, Frank, and Jim were teachers attending a research forum. Ken made two introductions: one between Frank and Jim, the other between his son, Eric and the other two teachers. For the purpose of the present discussion, only the first introduction is provided.

Ken: Hi, how are you?
Frank: Fine, how are you?
Ken: I'm fine. Frank, I'd like you to meet Jim from my school.
Frank: Hi.
Jim: Nice to meet you.

In the above example, social status and social distance did not appear to be relevant since the introducees, Frank and Jim, were both equal in status (teachers), and both Frank and Jim was close to Ken (the introducer). The remaining possible factor that determined the introduction sequence was Ken's intent to continue talking with the same person (i.e., Frank). Accordingly, after saying, "I'm fine" in response to Frank's previous greeting, "How are you?" Ken introduced Jim, the silent party beside him, to Frank with whom he was conversing. Using a different introduction sequence, namely, introducing Frank to Jim, would have interrupted the conversation between Ken and Frank.

> At the library, Sally was working at the desk, when two of her friends, Kathy (the introducer) and Debbie, came to the desk with another girl (Jane), whom Sally did not know.

Kathy: I didn't know you were working tonight?
Sally: I was covering for a friend.
Debbie: Hey! Did you see this ad?
Sally: What ad?
Jane: Here!
Sally: You must be kidding!
Jane: I thought so too, but it's for real. Hey! You guys haven't introduced me.
Kathy: Oh...yeah... right...sorry! Jane, this is Sally, Sally, this is Jane.

Following Basic Rule 4, Kathy continued Jane's conversational flow by introducing Sally (who was silent at that moment) to Jane (who was talking). If Kathy introduced

Jane to Sally instead, Jane's conversational flow would have been abruptly interrupted.

Combined Patterns with Congruent Conditioning Factors

The four patterns mentioned above are rather clear-cut. In each, one distinct factor (social status, social distance, situational context, or the introducer's intent to continue the conversational flow) determines the introduction sequence. However, examples with a single conditioning factor are rare in the data except for data supporting Basic Rule 3. Many tokens of other-introduction involve congruent conditioning factors that are hard to sort out. Two, and sometimes three variables (social status + social distance, social distance + situational context, social distance + the introducer's intent, or social status + social distance + the introducer's intent) are prevalent in the data.

Combined Pattern 1: Basic Rule 1 (status) and Basic Rule 2 (social distance)

Ruth went to a graduate class with her boyfriend, Richard, who introduced Ruth to his professor, Dr. Douglas.

Richard: This is Ruth I wanted you to meet.
Dr. Douglas: Hi.
Ruth: Hi.
Dr. Douglas: Yes, I've been looking forward to your coming.
Ruth: Thank you. I've been looking forward to coming.

In the above example, Ruth, as a student, assumed a lower social status than the professor of the class, Dr. Douglas; Basic Rule 1 (social status) was met. Moreover, Ruth, as a girl friend of Richard, was closer to Richard than to professor Dr. Douglas; Basic Rule 2 was also met. Therefore, Ruth was introduced to Dr. Douglas first.

Combined Pattern 2: Basic Rule 2 (social distance) and Basic Rule 3 (situational context–the new conversant))

Kevin (the introducer) and Rosa went to the table where Susan was already sitting. Kevin and Rosa have been friends for four years (close social distance). Kevin and Susan have been friend for four months (medium social distance)

Kevin: Susan, Rosa. (indicating "Susan, this is Rosa" by pointing)
Rosa, Susan. (indicating "Rosa, this is Susan" by pointing)
Susan: Hi.
Rosa: Hi (almost simultaneously).

In this situation, Susan was the new conversant. Therefore, based upon Basic Rule 3 (the situational context), Rosa (the old participant) should be introduced to Susan. In addition, Rosa was a closer friend to Kevin and should also be introduced to Susan (less close to Kevin), according to Basic Rule 2 (social distance). Hence, the introducing sequence in this instance was attributed both to Basic Rule 2 and Basic Rule 3.

Combined Pattern 3: Basic Rule 2 (social distance) and Basic Rule 4 (the introducer's intent to continue the conversational flow)

During the break of a class, Carol was sitting in the row in front of Richard (the introducer) and his girl friend, Ruth.

Richard: Hey, Carol, did you bring that prospectus?
Carol: (turning around) No, I forgot it.
Richard: This is Ruth, by the way.
Ruth: Hi.
Carol: Hi. I'm sorry.
Richard: That's O.K.

In this instance, Richard seemed to follow Basic Rule 2 (social distance) in introducing Ruth (his girl friend) to Carol (his classmate). However, it was also natural for Richard to introduce Ruth to Carol since he was talking to Carol, following Basic Rule 4 (intent to continue the conversation). Introducing Carol to Ruth would interrupt the conversational flow between Richard and Carol. Hence, both Basic Rule 2 and Basic Rule 4 contributed to this introduction sequence.

Combined Pattern 4: Basic Rule 1 (social status), Basic Rule 2 (social distance), and Basic Rule 4 (the introducer's intent)

Ken, Frank, and Jim were teachers attending a research forum. Ken made two introductions: one between Frank and Jim, the other between his son, Eric and the other two teachers.

Ken: Hi, how are you?
Frank: Fine, how are you?
Ken: I'm fine. Frank, I'd like you to meet Jim from my school.
Frank: Hi.
Jim: Nice to meet you.
Ken: This is my son, Eric. (to Frank and Jim).

The second introduction made by Ken between his son and the other two teachers seemed to involve three factors. In terms of social status, Ken's son was the

lowest among the four participants, so he was introduced to Frank and Jim, who were higher in status. In terms of social distance, Ken's son was closer to Ken and was therefore introduced by Ken to the other two teachers. However, it was also possible that such an introduction sequence was due to the fact that Ken wanted to continue the talk with Frank and Jim (Basic Rule 4). Hence, Basic Rule 1, Basic Rule 2, and Basic Rule 4 all contributed to this introduction sequence.

Overriding Patterns with Conflicting Conditioning Factors

The first section of the study deals with four Basic Rules having one distinct conditioning factor; the second section deals with four Combined Patterns having congruent conditioning factors. It would be interesting to know which are the overriding factors in patterns with conflicting variables.

Basic Rule 3 (situational context) overrides Basic Rule 2 (social distance)

(1) Richard (the introducer) and Ruth were sitting down, waiting for a class to begin when Mark, a friend of Richard's, came in and sat down next to Ruth.

Richard: Mark, this is Ruth. Ruth, this is Mark.
Ruth and Mark: Hi. (Shake hands.)

(2) During a class break, Richard (the introducer) was sitting with a friend; Paul, when Ruth came out of the bathroom.

Richard: Ruth, this is Paul.
Paul: How ya doin?
Ruth: Hi.

In both examples, Richard followed Basic Rule 3 (situational context) in introducing the old participant beside him to the new conversant. The new conversant in example (1) was Mark, so Ruth was introduced to him. The new conversant in example (2) was Ruth, so Paul was introduced to her. However, in example (1), Basic Rule 2 (social status) was also present since Ruth (lower social distance to Richard) was introduced to Mark (greater social distance to Richard). In example (1), it was unclear which of the two was the overriding factor since they were congruous with each other.

Looking more closely at example (2) found that the factor of situational context (the new conversant) appeared to override that of social distance when these two were in conflict. In example (2), Paul (greater social distance from Richard) was introduced to Ruth (lower social distance from Richard). Here, it is clear that the factor

that conditioned this introduction sequence was situational context. Ruth was the new conversant and thus Paul was introduced to her.

> Sharon and Martha (the introducer) walked into an office in a church where Martha and Kelly were colleagues.
>
> Martha: Kelly, this is Sharon. Sharon, this is Kelly.
> Kelly: Oh, it's nice to meet you!
> Martha: Kellly's heard so much about you. She keeps saying that she wants to meet you.
> Kelly: I'm the one who called you up at your parents' house.
> Sharon: Oh, you're the one.

In this example, Sharon (greater social distance from Martha) was introduced to Kelly (lower social distance from Martha), which violated Basic Rule 2. However, in terms of Basic Rule 3 (situational context), Kelly was the new conversant and Sharon was the old participant; therefore, Sharon was introduced to Kelly. It appears that Basic Rule 3 overrides Basic Rule 2.

Does Basic Rule 3 (situational context) override Basic Rule 1 (status)?

Given the above finding (Basic Rule 3 overrides Basic Rule 2), it is natural to ask if Basic Rule 3 also overrides Basic Rule 1 (social status). However, due to the limited data set, the hypothesis could not be empirically tested. Native speaker intuitions indicated that this would not be possible. Imagine the following situation which involves social status and situational context in conflict with each other.

> Allan was sitting in the classroom, talking with his professor, Dr. Stone when his friend, Jessica walked in.

It is easy to imagine that Allan would say:

> Professor Stone, this is my friend, Jessica.

But it seems unlikely for him to utter:

> Jessica, this is my professor, Dr. Stone.

It seems that Basic Rule 3 (situational context) cannot override Basic Rule 1 (social status); but rather, Basic Rule 1 seems to override Basic Rule 3. Of course, as mentioned earlier, intuitions of native speakers are often inadequate and unfounded. Empirical data is needed to test this hypothesis.

Does Basic Rule 2 (social distance) override Basic Rule 1 (social status)?

Again, this question could not be fully answered. However, there was one example relevant to this discussion.

> In a college alumni interview that took place at Tony's home, Tony (the introducer) and George were the two interviewers; Oscar was the interviewee.
>
> Tony: Hi, Oscar. I'm Tony Mason.
> Oscar: Nice to meet you. (They shake hands)
> Tony: This is George Lestor, who is also a D graduate.
> Oscar: Hi.
> George: Hi, how are you?
> Tony: Here. Take your coat off. (Takes his coat).
> Oscar: Thank you.

In this case, both Tony and George acted as gatekeepers (Erickson & Shultz, 1982) in that they had the power to make decisions which would affect Oscar's future in terms of college admission. Basic Rule 1 (social status) obviously did not apply here since George (higher in social status) was introduced to Oscar's (lower in social status). Basic Rule 2 (social distance) seemed to apply between Tony and George in the sense that Tony first introduced George (lower social distance from Tony) to Oscar (greater social distance from Tony). However, social status also played a role in this interaction: the introducer (Tony) in the above example was also higher in social status. In other words, two persons of higher social status (e.g., Tony and George) when the social distance between them is less than the social distance of either to the lower status individual can introduce each other to a third person (e.g., Oscar) of a lower status. This is not necessarily true when the introducer is lower in social status. This again needs further investigation.

Does Basic Rule 4 (the introducer's intent) override Basic Rule 2 (social distance)?

Having seen the discussion of the combined pattern that included congruent conditioning factors of the introducer's intent and social distance, it would be interesting to know if the introducer's intent overrides social distance in situations where these two factors are in conflict. The case remains unclear because no situations where these two factors were incompatible were found in the data. Imagine the following hypothetical introduction sequence:

Ruth is sitting in the row in front of her boy friend, Richard, who is sitting next to Carol, a classmate and acquaintance.

Richard: Ruth, did you bring the prospectus?
Ruth: No, I forgot it.
Richard: This is Carol, by the way.

In this example, Richard introduced Carol (greater in social distance) to Ruth (lower in social distance). This would go against Basic Rule 2, but would be quite natural if a person intended to maintain a conversational flow with the same speaker. If such a situation did occur, then we would have evidence to support a hypothesis of conversational continuity overriding. However, the data does not show such an introduction sequence. We cannot, therefore, know which would override the other.

Conclusion

In response to the research question, "How does social status affect the sequencing rules of other-introductions?" Four Basic Rules involving only one conditioning factor were found.

(1) In situations of unequal status, a person of a lower status will first be introduced to a person of a higher status (and then vice versa).

(2) In situations of equal status, the person who has lower (closer) social distance to the introducer will first be introduced to the person who has greater social distance from the introducer (and then vice versa).

(3) In situations of equal status which involves a new person entering a conversation, the old participant will first be introduced to the new conversant (and then vice versa).

(4) In situations of equal status within a context where a speaker wishes to continue conversational flow without abrupt interruption, he/she introduces the silent third party beside him/her to the person who is talking or whom he/she is conversing with.

The examples of the Basic Rules and Combined Patterns in the data are quantified in Table 2 (by Basic Rule) and Table 3 (by Combined Patterns).

Moreover, one Overriding Rule was found, as described below:

When an introduction sequence involves Basic Rule 3 (situational context) and Basic Rule 2 (social status) that are in conflict, Basic Rule 3 will override Basic Rule 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Occurrences by Basic Rule

Basic Rule 1	Basic Rule 2	Basic Rule 3	Basic Rule 4
2/30 (7%*)	2/30 (7 %)	9/30 (30%)	3/30 (10%)

*Percentages have been rounded off.

Table 3: Distribution of Occurrences by Combined Patterns

Combined Pattern 1	Combined Pattern 2	Combined Pattern 3	Combined Pattern 4
2/30 (7%*)	8/30 (27%)	3/30 (10%)	1/30 (3 %)

*Percentages have been rounded off.

Except for the four Basic Rules, four Combined Patterns, and one Overriding Rule, other relations discussed in the study are, at best, hypotheses that are empirically untested. These include the relationship between Basic Rule 1 (social status) and Basic Rule 3 (situational context); and the relationship between Basic Rule 1 (social status) and Basic Rule 2 (social distance). Also, the relationship between Basic Rule 2 (social distance) and Basic Rule 4 (the introducer's intent) remains unclear.

It is impossible to generalize about the sequencing rules due to the limited data set.This study does not deal with gender and age, which might also lend insight into the sequencing rules of other-introductions. Moreover, research that includes who initiates the introductions for what purpose would be useful in finding sequencing rules.[2]

[1] All the names of the participants in this study are fictional.

[2] The original version of this paper was submitted to Dr. Billmyer in Spring, 1992 for ED 650: Cross Culture Variation in Language Use.

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